

# The Prophets

## Lesson #10

### Introduction To Hosea

#### I. **Structure Of Hosea**

- A. Hosea contains fourteen chapters that are filled with some of the most powerful truths in all the Bible. After a brief introduction of himself as God's prophet, Hosea tells about his unusual family situation. God appeared to Hosea, instructing him, "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry, and children of harlotry" (1:2). The reason for this unusual request was to demonstrate that God's people, the nation of Israel, had been unfaithful to God because of their worship of false gods.
- B. Hosea did as the Lord commanded, taking a prostitute named Gomer as his wife. The first three chapters of the book report their stormy relationship as husband and wife. Soon after their marriage, Gomer bore three children. Hosea gave them symbolic names -- Jezreel (God scatters), Lo-ruhamah (Not Pitied), and Lo-ammi (Not My People), to show that God was about to bring His judgment upon the nation of Israel because the people had fallen into worship of false gods. Just as the nation rejected God, Gomer eventually left Hosea and the children to return to her life of prostitution, but Hosea's love for his wife refused to die. He searched until he found her at the slave market. Then he bought her back and restored her as his wife. This tender picture showed clearly that God had not given up on Israel, although the people had "played the harlot" many times by returning to their old life of pagan worship and enslavement to sin. The second major division of Hosea's book, chapters 4-14, contains the prophet's messages of judgment against the nations of Israel and Judah.
- C. The northern kingdom of Israel, Hosea's homeland, is singled out for strong rebuke because of its gross sin and immorality, but the book ends on a positive note. In tender language, the prophet reminds the nation of God's undying love. In spite of their unfaithfulness, He is determined to redeem them and restore them to their favored place as His people.

#### II. **Authorship And Date**

- A. All that we know about the prophet we discover from the autobiographical sections of the book itself. The undisputed author of this book is the prophet Hosea, who identifies himself in the book as "the son of Beeri" (1:1). His name, a variant form of Joshua and Jesus, means "salvation" or "deliverance." The prophet also says that he lived and prophesied during the reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel while four successive kings -- Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah -- were

ruling in Judah. This means his prophetic ministry covered a period of about 25 years, from about 750 B.C. to about 725 B.C. His book was written some time during these years.

- B. Most scholars agree that Hosea was a young man when Amos was almost through with his prophesying. Whereas Amos and Hosea prophesied to Israel, the northern kingdom, Isaiah and Micah were contemporaries who prophesied in Judah, the southern kingdom.

### III. ***Historical Setting***

- A. Hosea prophesied during the twilight years of the northern kingdom of Israel, a time of rapid moral decline. Worship of false gods was mixed with worship of the one true God. Ritualism rather than righteousness was the order of the day as even the priests lost sight of the real meaning of worship.
- B. Although King Jeroboam II was the instigator of many of these policies, at least his 40 year reign (793-753 B.C.) brought a measure of political stability to the nation. This stability came to an end when he died. In rapid succession, six different kings ruled Israel during the next 25 years; four of which were eliminated by assassination. Weakened by internal strife, Israel collapsed in 722 B.C. when the nation of Assyria destroyed Samaria, Israel's capital city. Hosea was probably an eyewitness to many of these events as his prophecy about God's judgment was fulfilled.

### IV. ***Scriptural Contribution***

- A. The literary features within Hosea's book suggest he was a member of the upper class. The tone and contents of the book also show he was a man of deep compassion, strong loyalty and keen awareness of the political events taking place in the world at that time. As a prophet, he was also deeply committed to God and His will as it was being revealed to His covenant people.
- B. Hosea is one of the most unusual prophets of the Old Testament, since he was commanded by God to marry a prostitute (Hosea 1:2-9). His wife Gomer eventually returned to her life of sin, but He bought her back from the slave market and restored her as his wife (Hosea 3:1-5). His unhappy family experience was an object lesson of the sin or "harlotry" of the nation of Israel in rejecting the one true God and serving pagan gods. Although the people deserved to be rejected because they had turned their backs on God, Hosea emphasized that God would continue to love them and use them as His special people. In his unquestioning obedience of God, Hosea demonstrated he was a prophet who would follow his Lord's will, no matter what the cost. He was a sensitive, compassionate spokesman for righteousness whose

own life echoed the message that God is love. Because of this, he is often referred to as the "prophet of love."

- C. Through his marriage and prophetic message, Hosea presents a vivid picture of the steadfast love of God for His people. Because they have sinned and broken the covenant, God's people deserve His certain judgment. However, because of His undying love for them, His mercy and lovingkindness will prevail. Many people believe the Old Testament portrays God's wrath, while the New Testament pictures His love. The book of Hosea, though, includes tender expressions of deep love among this prophet's descriptions of judgment. Hosea ranks with Deuteronomy and the gospel of John as major biblical treatises on the love of God. This love is not mere sentiment; it is rooted in compassion and bound in holiness. God's love makes demands, but it is also willing to forgive.

#### V. ***Special Considerations***

- A. Hosea is noted for its many references to the history of Israel, as well as its vivid poetic images. Throughout the book the prophet speaks tenderly of the nation of Israel as "Ephraim." This is a reference to the largest of the ten northern tribes of Palestine that made up the nation of Israel.
- B. Because of their superior numbers, Ephraim was a symbol of power and strength. This tribal name also reminded the nation of its history and tradition. Ephraim, after whom the tribe was named (Genesis 48:17-22), was the son of Joseph.
- C. Few events in the Bible have been debated as strongly as Hosea's marriage. The command for a man of God to marry a harlot is so startling that interpreters have offered many different explanations.
  - 1. Some suggest that the story is meant to be read only as an allegory.
  - 2. Others believe Gomer was faithful at first but went astray after their marriage.
  - 3. Still others believe she was a prostitute from the very beginning but that Hosea did not learn this until later.
- D. All of these approaches to the passage issue from our offended sense of right and wrong. The plain meaning of the text is that Hosea married a prostitute at God's direct command. In this way, through his own tormented life, Hosea could present a striking picture of the pain in God's heart because of the harlotries of His chosen people.